

Youth Peer Education Toolkit Provides New Resources for Programs

Y-PEER Program provides springboard for developing needed materials.



Youth peer education programs provide many benefits to target audiences and communities, but the quality of these programs varies widely. Even when they are well designed, these programs often face great challenges in implementation. Program managers and donors lack good assessment tools to help them determine which aspects of their programs are making the most impact on behavior change for youth. In addition, few well-grounded materials exist to help peer educators maintain their skills, to encourage ongoing enthusiasm for their work, and to train the trainers of peer educators. In addition, there are few widely agreed upon standards for peer education programs.

Marija Vasileva-Blazev, former coordinator of youth peer education for Health Education and Research Association (HERA) in Macedonia, tells a story familiar to many working in this field. “When I led the program, we had no formal standards,” she says. “And we lacked good, easy-to-use materials on such issues as monitoring, evaluation, and gender.”

To help program managers develop and implement successful peer education programs, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and Family Health International (FHI)/YouthNet have developed an ambitious five-part toolkit. It was produced

for the Youth Peer Education Network (Y-PEER), a project coordinated by UNFPA. The five documents build on the latest international scientific evidence and local experiences, especially from the Y-PEER projects (see box on back). The toolkit is designed for a global audience and may be adapted as needed to particular cultural settings and translated into local languages. The toolkit is available at: <http://www.fhi.org/en/Youth/YouthNet/Publications/peer-ed-toolkit/index.htm>. The five tools are summarized below.

Training of Trainers Manual

This six-day training program is based on the original Y-PEER manual used for three years in 27 countries and translated into more than a dozen languages. The revised edition provides advanced-level training sessions on topics such as recruitment, incentives, vulnerable young people, gender, monitoring and evaluation (M&E), and building youth-adult partnerships. “The new sections on M&E are particularly useful,” says Vasileva-Blazev. “Most peer education programs have trouble with M&E – what to report back to supervisors, for example.”

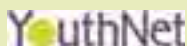
Standards in Peer Education

Developed during a consultative meeting with peer educators, trainers, project managers, and technical experts from 22 countries, this tool provides a framework of standards for programs, as well as tips and examples from around the world. The tool includes a description of 52 recommended standards grouped into five categories: planning, recruitment and retention, training and supervision, management and oversight, and M&E. “Programs in Eastern Europe are already starting to use this tool as a model for developing standards in their projects,” says Vasileva-Blazev, who continues to be involved with many Y-PEER projects through her work at YouthNet.

YouthNet Brief No. 18
Technical Leadership

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Theatre-Based Training Techniques

This tool includes four workshops designed to help peer educators integrate theater techniques into traditional peer education programs. It includes theater games and exercises and advice for advanced peer theater programs. “If you want your peer educators to remain interested and want to retain them for a long time, you should introduce different techniques – like those in the theater manual,” says Vasileva-Blazev.

Performance Improvement

Every program manager would like high-quality performance from their peer educators, but no tool exists to help managers evaluate and improve performance, from planning and training through monitoring and implementation. Adapted from a tool used to measure quality of care by reproductive health providers, this tool was created to fill this gap. It provides information on basic project management using common examples from the field.

Handbook for Assessing Peer Education Projects

No evidence-based tool has been available to help program managers or researchers evaluate the impact of their program on target audiences of youth. This new assessment tool includes a series of checklists that program managers can use to gather the data they need for measuring effectiveness. The checklists emerged from an in-depth research project that involved diverse peer education projects and determined what information is needed to measure effectiveness. The checklists address technical frameworks such as training, implementation, supervision, and monitoring. They also address youth-adult partnership, youth involvement, community and parental involvement, gender equity and equality, peer educator cooperation, and stakeholder cooperation.

— Maryanne Pribila

Maryanne Pribila, a technical officer at YouthNet, has worked with the Y-PEER program in multiple capacities, co-leading trainings and helping write the toolkit.

The Youth Peer Education Network (Y-PEER)

Y-PEER emerged in 2001 as a response to recommendations from a UNFPA-commissioned assessment of peer education efforts in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. The assessment found that hundreds of manuals related to peer education existed but many lacked consistency and duplicated efforts. Y-PEER was designed to provide more coordinated training, address gaps in capacity, link programs to resources, develop tools, and sponsor consultative meetings across 27 countries in these two regions. A Web site (www.youth-peer.org) provides tools and resources to members and visitors, as well as country-specific portals for Y-PEER networks in individual countries.

Y-PEER developed a training of trainers (TOT) manual and other tools that began to be used in these regions. Marija Vasileva-Blazev, like thousands of others across the region, was trained using the first TOT manual; she later used it to train others. From 2002 to 2005, some 300 nongovernmental organizations joined the Y-PEER network; 7,000 peer educators and master peer educators were trained; more than four million young people were reached; and all 27 countries adopted and adapted Y-PEER tools and resources.

The popularity of the initial Y-PEER tools and resources quickly began to attract broader attention, including support from FHI/YouthNet. In 2005, UNFPA led expansion efforts in 10 Arab-speaking countries in the Middle East (Jordan, Lebanon, the Palestinian Territory, and Syria) and Northern Africa (Algeria, Djibouti, Egypt, Morocco, Sudan, and Tunisia). FHI led Y-PEER expansion activities in Eastern Africa (Kenya and Tanzania).

—Maryanne Pribila

YouthNet Briefs is an activity of YouthNet, a five-year program funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development to improve reproductive health and prevent HIV among young people. The YouthNet team is led by Family Health International and includes CARE USA and RTI International.